A

VALEDICTORY DISCOURSE,

PREACHED TO

THE FIRST CHURCH AND SOCIETY

IN

DEERFIELD, MASS.

SEPTEMBER 20, 1829,

BY SAMUEL WILLARD, D. D.
MINISTER OF THAT SOCIETY.

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DISCOURSE.

Acts XX, 32.

'NOW, BRETHREN, I COMMEND YOU TO GOD, AND TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP, AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED.'

Paul, in his apostolic course from east to west, had passed over a great part of Asia Minor and Greece, proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation in many of the chief cities, and among others in Ephesus; where he continued three years, and collected a numerous church.

The solemn commission he had received, and the affectionate manner in which he had executed that commission, gave him a lively concern for the character and conduct of all his converts, and especially those to whom he had devoted most time and attention. He was taking, as he apprehended, his final leave of the Ephesian church, when he addressed to the elders the words of our text, intended, as I suppose, for the brethren generally: 'Now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.'

In commending the Ephesians to God, the apostle resigned the solemn office he had received in relation to them, so far as it required his personal presence,

and devoutly committed them to Him, who alone was able to guide and guard them ; to keep them from falling, and finally to 'present them faultless before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy.' In commending them to the 'word of divine grace,' he may perhaps be understood, as imploring for them the continued and full influence of the gospel, or as giving his final testimony to this religion, as calculated to promote, in the highest degree, their temporal and eternal welfare.

The apostles were second in authority to the great Head of the church, and, in some of the prerogatives and duties of their office, had no successors. From the earliest to the present times, however, there have been pastors and teachers, who have succeeded the apostles in preaching the gospel, administering divine ordinances, and watching over the spiritual interests of God's people. These have in all ages been more intimately connected with particular churches or religious societies ; connected, often for life, by the strongest ties, both civil and sacred. An ordinary minister of the gospel then, on quitting, at the call of Providence, the scene of his parochial labors, and especially if those labors have been continued for many years, and have been endeared and sanctified by mutual kindness and confidence, may pertinently adopt the language of the apostle in his final address ; 'Now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.' Thus, my brethren and friends, would I now bid *you* farewell.

On the approaching Wednesday, the anniversary of my ordination, I am to resign the solemn trust, committed to me twentytwo years ago; an office involving the most awful responsibility, which a mortal can assume. In consenting to become your minister, I became a watchman upon the walls of the holy city, engaging, in the presence of God and men, to interest myself in your spiritual welfare; to instruct you in 'the words of eternal life,' and to communicate to you, with all promptness and fidelity, those admonitions of God's word and providence, which might be important to your moral safety and final peace. In my apprehension, the providence of God now calls me from a station, whose duties are too various, and too full of consequence, to be retained by one, whom God in his unerring wisdom has seen fit to bereave of his natural vision, one of the principal means of intercourse between him and his people.

Of the manner, in which I have discharged my official duties, common decorum, and, as I think, the deepest convictions of my own heart, require me to speak humbly. Under the solemn recollections becoming the occasion, I have a trembling hope, and yet a soothing hope, that with the author of my text I may say, 'I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God;' that is, I am not conscious of having shunned to preach any doctrine or duty, which the apostle Paul, or the Lord Jesus, in similar circumstances, would have preached.

It has not indeed been my happiness, or my misfortune, to be thoroughly settled in my own mind in re-

spect to all points of modern, or ancient controversy; nor have I been very eager to inculcate on others all the articles of my own faith. Far from it; I have rarely or never brought into the pulpit some things, which, in other circumstances, might have been useful and important to my hearers. The principle, I conceive, is not of universal application, that we are to proclaim the truth, and the whole truth, whether men will hear or not. From the apostle Paul, and from one unspeakably greater than Paul, I have learned a very different lesson; a lesson, which cannot be too deeply imprinted on the ardent mind; 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.'

My forbearance in regard to speculative preaching has arisen from two considerations; first, an unwillingness to alienate or grieve those, who, though of different sentiments, were disposed to live and worship in harmony with us; and, secondly, a deep conviction, that preaching of this kind is not the most useful, even to those, to whom it is most gratifying.

During my whole ministry, I have humbly endeavored to give the exercises of the pulpit a moral effect on the heart and the life; to delineate every branch of practical duty; to prove, illustrate, and apply those great principles of the christian faith, from which are derived the strongest dissuasives from sin, and the most powerful excitements to virtue; and to engage all the purest, the warmest, and the noblest affections of the soul in the high employments, to which we are called.

In my theoretic discourses, I have intended to present to you the several subjects in the light, in which

they were presented to my own mind; wishing for your assent no farther, than would be justified by substantial argument. I hope the instances have been few, in which argument has sunk into mere declamation, and still fewer, in which it has become acrimonious. If in any case I have wounded the feelings of any by substituting personal or party invective for affectionate reasoning, I ask forgiveness at once of them and of my God.

How far my practical discourses have had their proper effect on your temper and lives, it is your part, and not mine to say. Though I have not in all instances prevailed to the extent of my wishes, both charity and justice forbid the complaint, that 'I have labored in vain, or spent my strength for nought.' Far more does it become me to mistrust myself, and to impute any apparent want of success to some defect in my public ministrations, or that private example, without which, the most eloquent preaching is ineffectual, unmeaning, and absurd. In the presence of those, who know me best, I may perhaps say that I have devoutly aimed to maintain a consistency between my public profession and my private life; and yet, in the presence of God omniscient, I have great reason to exclaim in the language of the Psalmist, 'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.' It is finished, however; my ministry is closed, and all regrets for past errors and defects, whether many or few, are of little avail. The most I can now do is, to implore forgiveness, and, so far as the living are concerned, deprecate the evil consequences.

It is a most affecting thought, that no small proportion of those, who were first committed to my pastoral care, have closed their probation ; passed beyond the sound of my voice and the reach of my influence, into a state, where, according to the common opinion of Protestants, I am not allowed even to pray for them. If, through defect of zeal on my part, any of these are lost, the deepest repentance can never avert the evil consequences from myself; Heaven can never be to me the blessed, the glorious place, it might otherwise have been : and while I live, it is almost overwhelming to believe, that,with the utmost fidelity on my part, any, by their own remissness, come short of the mercy of God. On the other hand, however, it is cheering to believe that many of those, who, in the course of twentytwo years, have been removed from this congregation to the great assembly of the dead, have been graciously accepted, and are now chanting with seraphic tongues, the praises of God and the Redeemer. Perhaps it may not be too much for me to hope, that my public and private ministrations have had some influence in soothing the pains of death, and preparing them for the glory they now enjoy.

To the living I would affectionately say, that, so far as I have been faithful in the awful trust reposed in me, you have a solemn account to give for the manner in which you have used those opportunities for religious improvement, which are now closed. The present should be a day of serious recollection to you and me. To many of you, as I trust, the occasion brings few painful reflections ; and if, by the grace of God,

you are habituated to the exercises and the pleasures of religion, I hope you are not less religious in consequence of your acquaintance with me. On the other hand, if I have ever done or said anything worthy of remembrance, to which you have not paid due attention, endeavor to recollect, and derive from it, even now, the practical benefit intended.

From the field of my past labors, if not in all things so productive as might have been wished, I have gathered precious fruits—the fruits of peace, and harmony, and kindness. While many other parishes have been scenes of discord and division, we have known how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Though not united in all our speculations, we have had no bitter strifes; we have harmonized in the common intercourse of life; we have taken sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company; we have worshipped at the same altar, sat down at the same table, and, with mutual sympathies and aids, been pursuing, with slight digressions, one luminous path to one and the same blessed end. For the harmony in which I have lived with you, and the peace and mutual affection in which I am permitted to retire from my sacred office, I would now make my grateful acknowledgments to you and to my God. At the same time, you will accept my thanks for every kindness I have received from you, whether as individuals, or as a society, and particularly for the candid allowances you have made for my imperfect services during the last ten years, a season which would otherwise have been dark indeed. Accept, too, my best wishes and most

fervent prayers for your future prosperity in all that is dear to you.

With my own personal acknowledgments, my beloved friends, I am authorised to unite those of my family, whom in some of your communications you have so kindly noticed.

The equal partner of my domestic interests and cares partakes largely in the sentiments I have expressed. So far as one can be a witness of the inward feelings of another, I can testify that she has always had a painful apprehension of failing in the discharge of some duties in relation to you, and to the great cause, in which her husband has been professedly engaged. Hence it has given her great relief to find, that you have candidly imputed to the frailty of her constitution, and to the peculiar claims of her family on her time and attention, what, to eyes more severe, might have seemed a want of activity and enterprise.

The younger members of my family will not leave this delightful valley without tender regrets; a scene of rural beauty excelling almost every other place in our country; where, in connexion with kind and pleasant companions, they have spent some of the happiest days they could ever expect to enjoy.

I add, that one, who for nearly twenty years enjoyed with me and mine an interest in your kindness, who has now gone to the land of silence, and for whom, I believe, you cherish respectful remembrance, would, if she had survived to this time, have sympathized in all the feelings with which we bid you adieu. Removing, as she had done, at an advanced age, and

in a state of peculiar sensibility, to a great distance from all the scenes and almost all the associates of her former days, associates for whom she still retained an unabated attachment, it was much to your credit, as well as hers, that she soon became so thoroughly satisfied with her new condition, regarding it no longer as a land of strangers, but as a happy home.

In surrendering the solemn charge, with which I have been entrusted; in dissolving the sacred ties, by which we have been so happily united; I would insist a little more, my dear friends, on the closing sentiment of my text, on the efficacy of that religion I have preached, in promoting the true happiness of man; on its intimate connexion with all that is glorious to the eye of intelligence, and all that is dear to the pure and feeling heart. Yes, my brethren, the christian faith is calculated, above everything else, to advance your private happiness, and to render the scene of your domestic labors, and cares, and joys, and occasional sorrows, a little heaven upon earth; while husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters are mutually united by the strongest bands of principle and affection, and are all prompted in their several spheres to unremitted efforts for their common good. The same influence will be diffused by the genuine spirit of the gospel, wider and wider, as the social circle enlarges, through neighborhoods, and churches, and towns, and states, directing and controlling every motion, harmonizing the most discordant interests of men, and leading infallibly to the happiest results in time and eternity.

Of the children now before me, I take an affectionate leave. Many of you these eyes have never known; but still I have had opportunities for giving you some lessons in relation to God and your duty, which I hope you will not forget, though you hear my voice no more. Still I cannot leave you without repeating in a few words the advice I have frequently given you. Always speak the truth; be kind one to another; honor and obey your parents; 'remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;' study your Bibles; 'be in the fear of the Lord all the day long;' and never for a moment forget that you were born to die. My dear children, farewell.

Those, who are now in the full vigor of life, will suffer me to mingle with my pastoral adieu a few words of exhortation to them. In general, you fill at this moment the most important stations intended for you in your respective spheres. Guardians and examples of the young, and supports, it may be, of declining age, your domestic duties are solemn and sacred. On you, too, depend chiefly the civil and religious interests of the communities, with which you are connected. Let not your private or domestic concerns then absorb your attention, and exhaust all your activity and zeal. Consult for others; act for others; suffer for others. Remember that the common good may be advanced or impeded by the most inconsiderable member of society; and endeavor in all your social transactions to blend in due proportions charity and zeal, firmness and condescension, and especially in the choice of a man to fill the sacred place, I am now to leave vacant. Wishing you the highest edification and comfort un-

der the ministry of my successor, I now bid you farewell.

With those, who are now descending into the vale of age, I must of course have a tender parting. It is not, I think, my will, but the providence of God, which has brought me into the posture, in which I now stand. Had not my sun been so early obscured, most cheerfully would I have continued with you, to solace the twilight of your day, and support your tottering steps on the verge of the grave. As it is, I would say, 'Peace be unto you; that peace of God which surpasseth all understanding.' With the unfailing consolations of religion, your last hours will be your happiest hours.

Though life is short and uncertain, the providence of God may give us another meeting, and a happy meeting on this side of eternity; still, it becomes us to remember that 'the time is short.' Yet a little while, and we must all commence that journey, on which we can never retrace a single step; from which, if faithful to Him who has called us, we shall not wish to return. Yet a little while, and the blessed hour will arrive, when, as I hope, I shall meet you in perfect holiness and glory, before the throne of God, through his rich mercy in the great Redeemer. Till that time, my respected fathers and mothers, farewell.

DR WILLARD'S COMMUNICATION

TO THE

First Congregational Church and Society in Deerfield.

My beloved Brethren and Friends,

The ties, by which a minister of religion is bound to a faithful and affectionate people, I have ever regarded, as too interesting and too sacred, to be lightly dissolved. Still it is my deliberate opinion, that the time is approaching, if it has not arrived, when it may be expedient that the connexion should cease between me and the people, with whom I have been so long and so happily united. If any ask the reason, on which this opinion is grounded, that reason may be given in three words; I am blind; three short words, which, to my apprehension, speak volumes.

More than ten years have elapsed, since it pleased God to deprive me so far of my natural vision, as to render me incapable of reading, of discerning the most familiar countenances, or of distinguishing objects, in general, with greater clearness, than others do by starlight. I have more light, indeed, than I formerly had in a moonless night; but the images of things are confused; and such are the effects produced by frequent changes of light and shade, cloud and sunshine, as to make it, in many instances, impossible for me to discern the largest object at the distance of three rods. Hence, in a considerable part of my parochial excursions, my feet and my staff are much better guides, than my eyes. In such a state it is almost needless to say, that the external duties of such a parish as this must, in many instances, and especially in the winter and spring, involve no ordinary exposure of life and limbs; to say nothing of the efforts they must always require. Should my life be continued, declining nature must, within a few years, render these hardships and dangers too great to be sustained, and call for a discharge from the service, in which I had expected to live and die.

With the kind assistance of Heaven, I have hitherto been carried through the various duties of my station in a manner acceptable, as I believe, to a candid and kind people, though not always satisfactory to my own mind. Whatever may be said of the manner, in which the duties of the minister in this parish have, for the last ten years,

been performed, it is evident, that a person in my situation must labor with peculiar disadvantages in securing that personal influence with some classes of the community, which is indispensable to success in the great cause, in which I am engaged. When I meet with children, I cannot call them by name, nor converse with them in a manner most likely to win their affections. The men, too, of my parish are generally engaged abroad during those hours, when alone I can visit their abodes; and as many of them are restrained by diffidence, or other feelings, engagements, or considerations, from visiting me, as I should wish, there is danger that we may live so great strangers one to another, that they will cease to feel any interest in my public performances. In such a course of things, the parish must inevitably languish, if it is not scattered, and reduced to such a state, as would not only give me the keenest anguish, but make me still more incapable of discharging my official duties.

Such appear to me the nature and tendency of things, and such the consequences to be apprehended from a long continuance of the connexion, now subsisting between us. Could I therefore separate my interest and convenience from yours, it appears to me I should feel little hesitation in recommending a separation, from regard to your welfare alone, as a course far more prudent, than that of incurring the probable expense of providing for two ministers at no very distant period.

If the connexion between me and you is eventually to cease, and I am to provide for myself and family in some other way, it will not, I am sure, be thought unreasonable, that I should wish to enter on my final course, before I have descended far on the down-hill of life; while something more remains, than the mere relics of my youthful powers. Beside this general reason, pointing to a time not far distant for making this great change in my condition, several things conspire to render the present more convenient for it, than any future season is likely to be. If I leave my parish, I shall wish for a school, both as a scene of usefulness, and a source of emolument; a school, in which I must, of course, be associated with some one, who unites a happy talent for government with a peculiar aptness for teaching. Such a school, and such an associate there is now so fair a prospect of procuring, as, in all probability, will never again be presented. In addition to this, I am expecting, that, with the leave of Providence, my only son will enter Harvard College within a year or two, and if ever my family are to remove, this consideration will render it desirable, that they should be on the ground, while he is there.

One thing, I am aware, not yet brought into view, will be urged

against any speedy separation; viz. that the parish are not now in so good a situation for such an event, as they may hope hereafter to be. Whether under my present disadvantages I am more likely to preserve the union and prosperity of the parish, than some other man would be, none, I think, can be very confident. From principles common to human nature, the excitements produced by a mere change, might, and probably would give my successor an attractive influence, which I can no more expect to have. On the other hand, if I should continue in this high and responsible office, and the issue of things should be unfavorable, no consolation would remain for me, but that of having given you this seasonable premonition.

Such, my friends, are my sentiments and feelings in regard to this momentous subject. Accordingly, it was in my mind to request a discharge from my ministerial office, while I relinquished, of course, all right and title to that maintenance, which, by the conditions of my settlement, you have pledged to me for life. Considering, however, that the thoughts suggested above may strike your minds in a different manner, I have thought it preferable to defer the final question, and simply to request of you to show reasons, if any adequate reasons exist, why the connexion subsisting between us, as pastor and people, should not, in the course of six or seven months, be amicably dissolved: which request is hereby made.

Any considerations, which you, in your wisdom, may suggest, will, I trust, receive due attention from me; and whatever may be the result of these discussions, your welfare will be forever dear to my heart.

Wishing you every blessing, temporal and eternal,

I am your devoted servant in the Lord,

SAMUEL WILLARD.

DEERFIELD, Feb. 28, 1829.

At a legal meeting of the members of the First Congregational Parish in Deerfield, held March 16, 1829———On the communication of Rev. Samuel Willard, of Feb. 28, 1829, in relation to the dissolution of his pastoral connexion with said parish, it was

Voted,—That, having lived so happily under the pastoral care of the Rev. Samuel Willard for so long a time, and participated in the enjoyments of social and religious intercourse with him and his family, it is a cause of deep grief to the First Congregational Parish, that he is under the necessity of making application to them for a dissolution of the relation.

The zeal and ability, with which his various duties have been executed, demand our warmest thanks, and it is a source of regret that they cannot be longer continued. But in view of the several reasons offered by him, in his communication to the parish, we are constrained to say, we have no substantial reasons to offer why his request should not be granted.

It was also voted to choose a committee to communicate the foregoing vote to Rev. Mr Willard, and to prepare a suitable address to him on the subject.

Elihu Hoyt, Pliny Arms, and Jonathan A. Saxton were accordingly chosen.

Attest,

CHARLES HITCHCOCK, *Clerk 1st Cong. Parish.*

TO SAMUEL WILLARD, D. D.

Rev. and dear Sir,

The undersigned, a committee of the First Congregational Society in Deerfield, in behalf of that Society, would express their deep and unfeigned regret, that the course of Providence should seem to indicate to you the expediency of a separation of the connexion, which has so long subsisted between you and them. The reciprocal relations of a minister and his flock are of the most momentous nature, involving the most solemn obligations, the highest, the immortal interests of mankind. Their dissolution must in almost any circumstances, be an event deeply to be deplored ; connected, as they are, by the dearest and most sacred associations, with the past, and the most consoling prospects, with the future, and combining so much, that is most joyful and animating in our recollections and hopes. The Society, which has had the happiness of enjoying your pastoral care for more than twenty years, have looked forward with pleasing anticipations, for its long continuance. They have sympathised affectionately in the physical afflictions, with which you have been visited. But since they have not perceived, as a consequence, any diminution of ability, zeal, and fidelity, in your public labors, or parochial ministrations, they were willing to believe that these would not be the cause of your separation from them. They have hoped that the ties, which had gained strength and interest by each succeeding year, would be sundered only by that final event, which dissolves all earthly relations.

There are many incidents in the history of your connexion with this Society, which have tended to render its relations more intimate

than those which ordinarily subsist between minister and people. This Society was the first, in this region of our country, practically to assert the rights of conscience ; and your settlement with them was the first step towards the establishment of the principles of religious freedom. Subjected as they, and especially yourself, have been in consequence, to obloquy and persecution, which, unhappily, have too many parallels, you, nor they, have not shrunk from the maintenance and manly vindication of their christian liberty. They have persevered in what they believed to be their duty to their Creator, themselves and their posterity, until they have seen the cause, of which they once led the forlorn hope, almost triumphant; the spirit of inquiry going forth with an energy and power, that can no more be repressed ; and numerous societies, professing the same principles, springing up around them, and some even in the high seats of their enemies. These animating results are, in a large degree, to be attributed to your example, influence, and instructions.

Notwithstanding the inauspicious circumstances, which marked its commencement, the Society, since your connexion with it, has enjoyed a degree of harmony within itself, almost unexampled. No bitter religious quarrels have ever disturbed its peace, and the order and confidence of social intercourse have been but rarely interrupted. You have had the rare felicity, in a period, when peculiarities of individual or sectarian opinion are too apt to be regarded as of more importance than unity of spirit, to unite in an assembly of peaceful and harmonious worshippers, those of the most different sentiments ; and who, in other circumstances, might have shrunk from presenting a common offering to the One Creator of all minds.

The Society would give their cordial and affectionate testimony to the unwearied fidelity and devotedness, with which all the duties of your pastoral office have been discharged ; whether in communicating instruction, and proclaiming the truths of religion in the sanctuary, giving counsel in difficulties, consolation in distress, or ministering by the bed of disease.

Your exertions, and their success, towards facilitating the acquisition of knowledge by the young, improving the process of education, and elevating the standard of attainment, deserve their warmest gratitude, in common with the whole community.

Your endeavors to improve the character of our sacred music, and especially to reconcile the appropriate expression of devout sentiment with the harmony of sounds, are not among the least of the obligations they have pleasure in acknowledging.

The uniform kindness they have received, in their social intercourse with yourself and your family, will long be remembered with affection.

But we will not repeat all the various benefits, which have resulted to this Society from its connexion with you; nor dwell upon the remembrances, and hopes, and fears, which render its termination painful. In this place, it might seem like studied flattery.

In these circumstances, it is with no ordinary emotions of regret, the Society is compelled to admit the force of the reasons contained in your communication; and to acknowledge that the time must, ere long, arrive, when a connexion so commenced, so continued, and so endeared, as ours has been, must cease, or exist only at the expense of great personal sacrifices to yourself, and those most dear to, and dependent upon you. They are not without urgent fears for the result to themselves; and cannot hope, in the ordinary course of things, soon again to enjoy a pastor so universally acceptable, so happily winning and uniting all minds. But in surrendering their claims, and consenting that your pastoral relations with them may terminate, they have the satisfaction of knowing, that you will act in a sphere of wider usefulness, and will exercise a more extended influence upon human character, than could be exercised within the humble limits of your present labors. The affections and grateful remembrance of your people will attend you and yours. Their prayers will ever be for your health, prosperity, and happiness, and the attainment of that glorious reward, which will finally be given to christian fidelity and virtue.

ELIHU HOYT,
PLINY ARMS,
J. A. SAXTON.

To the Gentlemen of the First Parish in Deerfield.

My dear friends,

As your vote of the 16th ult. is in perfect harmony with my views of expediency, I now request that the solemn and interesting relation I bear to you, as your minister, if not sooner dissolved by my death, should cease at such time, as may be found most convenient for me, between the 11th of August and the 24th of September next; engaging, on my part, to give to the Committee, who shall be appointed for supplying the pulpit, previous and satisfactory notice of the particular time, when I wish it to cease. I also request, that

provision may be made for a small Council to execute the usual formalities of such an occasion.

Wishing you grace, mercy, and peace,

I am, Gentlemen,

your friend and servant in the Lord,

SAMUEL WILLARD.

DEERFIELD, April 13, 1829.

At a legal meeting of the members of the First Congregational Parish in Deerfield, held April 27 1829,—*Voted*, that the connexion between the Parish and the Rev. Samuel Willard, as their minister, be dissolved, agreeably to his request, made to the parish April 13, 1829.

Deacon Seth Nims, Ebenezer H. Williams, Esq. and Mr Quartus Hawks were chosen a committee, in connexion with Mr Willard, to select a council for his dismission.

Attest,

C. HITCHCOCK, *Clerk 1st Cong. Parish.*

RESULT OF THE COUNCIL.

Deerfield, Sept. 23, 1829.

In compliance with a request from the First Congregational Church and Society in Deerfield, and from the Pastor of the same, an ecclesiastical council convened at the house of Gen. Thomas Gilbert, 'for the purpose of witnessing, declaring, and solemnizing' the dissolution of the ministerial connexion of the Rev. Samuel Willard, D. D. with this church and society. There were present,

From the First Congregational Church in Bernardston, Rev. Timothy F. Rogers, pastor, Deacon Thomas Snow, delegate ;

From the First Congregational Church in New Salem, Rev. Alpheus Harding, pastor, brother Isaac Barton, delegate ;

From the First Congregational Church in Warwick, Rev. Preserved Smith, Jr. pastor, Deacon Josiah Proctor, delegate ;

From the third Congregational Church in Greenfield, Rev. Winthrop Bailey, pastor, Hon. Samuel C. Allen, delegate.

The council was organized by choosing Rev. Timothy F. Rogers Moderator, and Rev. Winthrop Bailey, Scribe.

After uniting in prayer, offered by the Moderator, the Council proceeded to consider the communications, which had passed be-

tween Dr Willard, and the society, with which he is connected, relating to the expediency of dissolving this connexion ; and after due consultation and discussion, adopted the following result.

The subject, on which we are called to act, is one of great interest to this religious society, and to their pastor.

In bringing this important subject before his church and society, Dr Willard has stated in a clear and satisfactory manner, the reasons, which have induced him at this time to request a dissolution of the connexion subsisting between him and them. The single circumstance, in which these reasons centre, and from which they derive all their force, he has expressed in 'three short words—I am blind;' a circumstance, which cannot but deeply affect every heart. Under the privation of sight he has now labored for more than ten years; and whatever others may conjecture, imagine, or observe, he alone can fully know the difficulties and perplexities resulting from this loss. Anxious as we feel, that he should retain a station in which we believe him to have been eminently useful, yet when we consider the obstacles and dangers, which he must encounter, we cannot ask him to do it. And though, as the friends of Dr Willard, our feelings might be gratified by having his duties and cares in a great measure transferred to a colleague, yet, as no proposition of this nature seems to have been made by him, or by the society; as they are in a situation to form the most correct judgment whether such a procedure would be expedient; and as they themselves say, that they 'have no substantial reasons to offer, why his request should not be granted;' we should feel that, in offering any advice, or even in expressing any opinion on this subject, we were stepping aside from the course marked out for us. In view, therefore, of all the circumstances of the case, we believe that Dr Willard is fully justified in requesting, and this society in granting a dissolution of that sacred connexion, which has so long, and so amicably subsisted between them; and in compliance with the wishes of those, by whom we have been called to act on this interesting occasion, we hereby declare it dissolved. In coming to this conclusion, and in making this declaration, we are led to notice with no small satisfaction, the deliberation, the entire harmony, the christian spirit, which have marked all the proceedings relating to this important change. And while we rejoice, that our present duties have not originated in any dissensions between the pastor and the people, in any disaffection on his part, or on theirs; while we rejoice to find that the mutual esteem and attachment, which for so many years have been cherished between them, continue unabated to the last; we would express our sympathy with him, under that severe trial, the loss of natural vision, which, by a wise and holy

providence he has been called to sustain, and in consequence of which he has felt constrained to request a separation from an affectionate and united society. We have observed with great pleasure the meekness and submission, with which he has appeared to endure this trial, and the undiminished activity and zeal, with which he has performed the most important services. The character of Dr Willard, as a learned, faithful, and exemplary minister of the gospel, is too well known to need any testimonial from us; and it may perhaps be deemed superfluous to add, that as such, we recommend him to Christians, wherever he may be invited occasionally or statedly to preach. Our best wishes will attend him and his family in the place, in which providence may fix their residence, and in whatever employment he may be engaged. Regretting, as we cannot but do, his separation from those, whose highest welfare he has labored to promote, and his retirement from a scene, in which we believe him to have been subservient in no ordinary degree to the interests of religious liberty, and of intellectual and moral improvement, we yet devoutly hope, that he may occupy a sphere, in which his influence will be still more extensive and salutary. May the blessing of our Almighty Father accompany him at all times; comfort him under every affliction; adorn him more and more with the various excellences of the christian character; and at length introduce him to that state of light, and peace, and joy, where 'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, forever and ever.'

We would also express our sympathy with this christian church and society. It is with no ordinary feelings of satisfaction, that we have witnessed the example of peace and harmony, which, in a time of general division and strife, they have exhibited. Nor would we omit to signify our approbation of the firm and manly stand, which they have taken and maintained, in favor of the rights of conscience and private judgment. While we utter these sentiments respecting this whole society, we would not fail to acknowledge the credit which we believe is justly due to those individuals, who notwithstanding their dissent from some of the opinions of their pastor, have continued to love, and respect him, and to attend regularly on his ministrations.

With this society would we unite in expressions of 'deep and unfeigned regret,' that they are now called to relinquish the services and instructions of one, whom they so cordially esteem and so highly value, as a citizen, a friend, and a christian minister, and with whom they have been so happily united in these interesting relations for a period of twentytwo years. May they still continue to know by ex-

perience, 'how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.' May they ever cultivate that spirit of forbearance, condescension, and kindness, which is a prominent trait in the christian character, and equally essential to individual comfort and social happiness. Under the watchful care of 'God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ,' the head of the church, may they soon be united in the choice of another pastor, who, in learning, candor, prudence, fidelity, and usefulness, shall not be inferior to him, from whom they are now separated. The instructions and example of such a religious teacher may they enjoy for many years to come. As, in the course of providence, the present generation are successively removed from this earthly scene, trained, as we devoutly pray they may be, for higher and nobler employments in a future world, may they again enjoy the society of him, whom they now bid an affectionate farewell; and may their children, and their children's children, now rising up to fill their places, advance in knowledge and goodness, be useful in their respective stations, and through the riches of divine mercy become prepared to join 'the general assembly and church of the first born, who are enrolled in heaven.'

Voted, unanimously, to adopt the foregoing as the result of this Council.

TIMOTHY F. ROGERS, *Moderator.*

WINTHROP BAILEY, *Scribe.*